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RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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SUBJECT: ERITREANS NOTIFIED OF RELATIVES, DEATHS AT W'IA

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Beginning in September, Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) officials began notifying parents and spouses in Asmara of the deaths of their relatives during the past three to six months in the W'ia military training camp. Going from family to family, GSE military representatives have been telling parents and spouses that their child/spouse died on unspecified date of heat exhaustion. The GSE has informed approximately 100 families of their relatives' deaths during this recent round of notifications. One Eritrean mother told Emboff she became worried when she had received no news of her daughter for nearly six months. On her own initiative she traveled in September to W'ia a full-day journey by bus, with the intention of visiting her twenty-something daughter who is fulfilling her required military service. Family members are required to receive pre-approval from their region administrator prior to visiting family members at military installations, such as W'ia and Sawa. The mother did not receive permission to visit W'ia prior to her departure from Asmara, and was arrested by the military upon arrival and detained for two days. During the afternoon of the third day, they forced her to return to Asmara, without providing her any information about her daughter's status. To date, the mother has received no information about her daughter. Another Eritrean who works as a medic at W'ia informed Emboff separately that the woman's daughter had died many months ago.

¶2. (C) Comment: W'ia is located in the Southern Red Sea region of Eritrea, on the edge of the Danakil depression one of the hottest, most inhospitable places on the planet. Despite temperatures in the summer that regularly exceed 110 degrees Fahrenheit, those assigned to W'ia are often forced to survive on less than half a liter of water per day. A military training camp in name that can hold thousands and thousands of people, the location serves both as a training site for the military, particularly the newly conscripted, and a detention facility for those who have evaded national service or are being persecuted by the GSE for other reasons, such as membership in an unregistered church. Sadly, deaths at W'ia are a common occurrence, as are long delays in the notifications to family members of deaths. In July, meningitis reportedly swept through camp resulting in many deaths. The medic told Emboff that because of the weather conditions in W'ia returning the body to the families is

almost impossible, as decomposition begins immediately.

13. (C) Comment con't: The poor conditions at military training camps and detention facilities in Eritrea are well known and frequently discussed among the Eritrean population.

W'ia does stand alone in its extreme conditions and the severity of the weather. Post has received reports in the past that the individuals assigned to, or detained, at W'ia are forced into hard labor in the hot mid-day sun with poor nutrition and little water. In addition, Post has also been told that W'ia is frequently overcrowded and the facilities themselves can not support the population held there. All water and food must be brought in and shortages are reportedly a regular event. End Comment.

MCINTYRE